

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: October 14, 2008

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Study Highlights Benefit of Conservation and Wetlands Reserve Program

ST. PAUL, October 14, 2008 - A recently completed study concludes that two U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs provide benefits on more than 5 million acres of wetland and adjacent grassland habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region, Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer announced here today at the White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy.

"Voluntary conservation efforts have proven benefits to a vast region of significant wetland acres that provide excellent wildlife habitat and benefit local residents," Schafer said.

The study quantified how the establishment and management of prairie wetlands and associated grasslands through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) have positively influenced ecosystem services in the following ways:

- Reduction in offsite sediment and nutrient impacts;
- Reduction of soil loss;
- Interception and storage of precipitation that would contribute to downstream flooding;
- Improvement in wetland and upland plant and animal communities;
- And a potential to sequester carbon in soil and vegetation.

The study, "Ecosystem Services Derived from Wetland Conservation Practices in the United States Prairie Pothole Region with an Emphasis on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve Programs," was conducted by U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) researchers with support from the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), a multi-agency effort led by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS). The study is available at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/1745/>.

NRCS administers WRP as a voluntary program and provides technical and financial assistance to help landowners establish and manage wetland ecosystems. The goal of the program is to achieve, for the funds expended, the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This conservation program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation easements that benefits wildlife and sustain other wetland ecosystem functions.

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Minnesota NRCS has a leading edge program to leverage federal dollars available for WRP easements. Through a partnership effort with the State of Minnesota, 30-year WRP easements are carried into perpetuity with the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program. The combination of WRP and RIM thus ensures that the benefits derived from the protection of these critical habitats will continue indefinitely.

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